

Roderick L. Bremby

**Testimony before the
Executive and Legislative Nominations Committee**

February 5, 2015

Good morning, Senator Duff and Representative Janowski, Senator Kane and Representative Buck-Taylor, and distinguished members of the Executive and Legislative Nominations Committee. My name is Roderick Bremby, and I appear before you as Governor Malloy's nominee for a second term as Commissioner of the Department of Social Services. Thank you for this opportunity to present testimony and respond to your questions about my work at the department over the last term (46 months) and going forward.

First, I would like to say that I am deeply honored by Governor Malloy's re-nomination and his ongoing support of the department's mission and services. Over the first term, the Governor and OPM Secretary Ben Barnes have invested in sorely-needed resources to set DSS on the right course after years of infrastructure inattention. At the same time, I greatly appreciate the General Assembly's support of these investments, as well as your constructive oversight role in all budgetary and service matters.

As you know, DSS is a large agency. We serve over 950,000 individual Connecticut residents across all programs. We have close to 2,000 dedicated staff in 13 offices. Our budget is the largest of any state agency, mainly due to our success in providing quality health coverage to children, families, older adults and persons with disabilities.

Since the time I had the privilege of joining the Malloy-Wyman Administration in April of 2011, my goal has been to move DSS toward becoming a world-class service organization. This is not to say the agency performed poorly before we arrived. However, we needed to do much better. We needed to make the agency more accessible and efficient. We needed to bring its technology into the 21st century. And we needed to instill the values of communication, service and accountability throughout the enterprise.

Four years later, I believe we have made substantial progress in turning this proverbial aircraft carrier around. World-class service status may be aspirational for any government agency, but it is crucial to pursue and achieve to the greatest extent possible. It's not a science or accreditation. It basically reflects a constant drive toward service excellence and efficiency. And a big part of this, as I've shared with our staff, is how we interact with people – customers and colleagues alike.

We endeavor to interact with everyone in a respectful manner, even when the information is not what they're hoping for – parenthetically, there are thousands of applicants who turn out to be ineligible for services – but people will remember government as a decent and respectful place in their time of stress.

It's a heavy lift, as our systems are inherently complex and many programs are based on both federal and state statutes. Our customers' needs are often intense. But DSS staff make a difference in thousands of lives each and every day. I am very proud of the job our staff do. It's not easy work. Most folks don't come to us in the best of circumstances. But we are helping hundreds of thousands of Connecticut citizens with our safety-net services every day. I appreciate your indulgence as I share my appreciation for the hard working committed DSS employees who provide a lifeline for so many of our neighbors, young and old.

Mr. and Madam Chairs, and Senators and Representatives, many of you know me from the first term but, briefly, my professional background is centered in public administration, with some time in academia. I have served at the municipal government level in Texas and Kansas where I served for ten years as chief operating officer of the City of Lawrence (home of the University of Kansas). I was a faculty member and researcher at the University of Kansas. For two terms, eight years, I was cabinet-level Secretary of the Kansas Department of Health and Environment, that state's combined public and environmental health agency.

Over my career, I have always tried to serve and lead with the citizen, customer and client first and foremost in mind. Compassion for people, combined with professional stewardship on behalf of taxpayers in general, is what the public sector must deliver.

When Governor Malloy invited me to come to this beautiful state four years ago, he let me know I had my work cut out for me – and he certainly wasn't kidding! Together with the Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Legislators, and our colleagues in the executive branch, we have made solid progress, and are committed to further improvements.

As just a few examples, we have:

- successfully transitioned Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program from primarily for-profit managed care contractors to a streamlined data driven administrative-services system, bringing service enhancements and economies, including 14.6% increase in primary care providers, 11.4% increase in specialists, 12.7% increase in dentists, reduced emergency department usage and 2.7% reduced per member/per month cost.
- Developed quality initiatives in Medicaid, including Person-Centered Medical Homes, Intensive Care Management (reducing in-patient admissions for participants by 43% and emergency department use by 6%, tobacco cessation incentives, health equity review, prevention strategies.

- Helped facilitate Connecticut's Medicaid expansion under the national Affordable Care Act, extending health coverage to 63,000 additional low-income adults without dependent children since January 2014, for a total of about 175,000, while leading DSS coordination with Access Health CT.
- Deployed a modernized application process that has digitized over 7.5 million incoming documents and offer first-time online options for applicants and clients.
- Launched planning and development of a new integrated eligibility management system to replace the agency's 1980s-era eligibility system, utilizing 90% federal funding.
- Built agency capacity that has enabled service to over 400,000 Connecticut residents eligible for the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and over 750,000 eligible for Medicaid, among other services.
- Expanded home-care services and development of Connecticut's Strategic Plan to Rebalance Long-Term Services and Supports.
- Replaced a broken system of zero-to-poor phone access to DSS staff with a statewide toll-free number with access to interactive voice-response system and Benefits Centers staffed by eligibility workers. While call wait times need to be reduced, over 30,000 callers per month are served by workers (nearly 750,000 total since July 2013). Hundreds of thousands more callers have been able to access information without the intervention of workers, including after hours, on weekends and during times when offices are closed and workers unavailable.
- Launched 24/7 online and interactive voice-response system access for clients, as well as online application and change reporting.

In closing, I appreciate very much your consideration of my nomination by Governor Malloy to continue leading the Department of Social Services over this critical next term. Under the Governor's leadership and with your kind support, I look forward to continuing our work with members and committees of the General Assembly, as well as with service partners and advocates throughout the state.

Thank you, and I am happy to respond to any questions you might have.